

serve in the pivotal role as U.S. Ambassador to Germany.

For the information of all Senators, there is a strong likelihood that a significant number of additional votes will be held later today. If so, we want to make sure things keep moving briskly on the floor. Just as we did last week, I ask my colleagues to cast their votes quickly, to remain in their seats or near the floor as much as possible, and to be flexible in order to prevent extended delays. We did a good job of it last week, so let's continue the pace this evening as well when we move forward on more votes.

Off the floor, it is an important day for my home State of New York when it comes to nominations. A few moments ago, it was my honor to come before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and introduce Assemblyman Nick Perry to serve as Ambassador to Jamaica. I was also proud to introduce Randi Charno Levine to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Portugal. It would be impossible—impossible—to find a better fit for Ambassador to Jamaica than my friend Nick Perry, whom I urged the Biden administration to select for the post.

Assemblyman Perry represents so much of what is good and promising about America: He is an immigrant; he is an Army veteran; he is a graduate of Brooklyn College and one of New York's leading voices fighting for working families. He is a very, very familiar face in Brooklyn because he likes to do politics the old-fashioned way: shake hands, show up as much as possible, and just listen to people's stories.

When confirmed, Assemblyman Perry would make history as the first ever native-born Jamaican to serve as U.S. Ambassador. It is a truly important milestone and one that is long overdue, and it makes Brooklyn particularly proud.

When I go through Brooklyn, I sometimes ask my constituents, particularly at the West Indian Day Parade, I ask them: What is the largest island in the Caribbean? I tell him it is a trick question. Some people say Cuba. Some people say Haiti. Some people say Barbados.

I say, no, Brooklyn is the largest island in the Caribbean because we have more Caribbean immigrants than just about anywhere else. And that is why Brooklyn, particularly, is so proud that Nick is going to become our Ambassador to Jamaica. Not only is he Jamaican-born, but he is a Brooklynite through and through.

From Patrick Ewing to KRS-One, from Vice President KAMALA HARRIS to Congresswoman YVETTE CLARKE, to the late General Powell, Jamaican Americans hold a key place in our Nation's rich legacy. Nick Perry will continue to add to this legacy, as he has for decades. So I am so proud to support him and to recommend him as nominee for Ambassador to Jamaica.

This morning, it was also my honor to introduce Randi Levine to become

only the second woman to ever serve as Ambassador to Portugal. I have known Randi and her husband Jeff for over 30 years. They have been longtime advocates for many different communities across New York, especially our Jewish population.

As chair of the Meridian Center for Cultural Diplomacy here in Washington, Randi has also been one of our top leaders for promoting cultural exchanges between students, diplomats, and business leaders. In other words, she has already advanced—in a different context—the work that any good Ambassador must accomplish: encouraging and fostering understanding between our country and people around the world. I have every bit of confidence that Randi will represent the United States with distinction as an ambassador to Portugal, and she has my most enthusiastic support.

Finally, I also want to recognize and commend the nomination of Professor Deborah Lipstadt to serve as the State Department's Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, a position that carries the rank of Ambassador.

Dr. Lipstadt's leadership is desperately needed. The malicious poison of anti-Semitism must be confronted whenever it rears its ugly head. We have seen a spike of anti-Semitism here at home and abroad, making this position exceedingly important.

As one of the Nation's top scholars on the Holocaust and on modern-day anti-Semitism, Dr. Lipstadt ought to be confirmed as soon as possible, and I am glad she is receiving her confirmation hearing today.

FORCED ARBITRATION

Mr. President, now last, on forced arbitration, last night, Congress took an important and overwhelmingly bipartisan step forward in the fight to eliminate forced arbitration for victims of sexual harassment and assault.

By a large, large margin—335 to 97—our House colleagues approved legislation that, for the first time ever, would ensure people who face sexual harassment or assault at work have the freedom to hold employers accountable in court. It would eliminate the long-used practice of including forced arbitration clauses in employee contracts, which, for so long, have effectively served as a condition for employment.

I commend my House colleagues for approving forced arbitration legislation with overwhelming bipartisan support. If you look at the vote, it is pretty clear that a majority of both parties voted for this legislation.

It is my intention to move on this bill as quickly as we can in the Senate, and we hope to take action here on the floor as soon as this week. I expect it will be met with nothing less than broad support from both parties, enabling us to move quickly.

The legislation has been years in the works, and I want to recognize my friend Senator GILLIBRAND, who has spearheaded the cause of ending forced

arbitration on this issue for a long time. Thanks to her leadership, we are close to seeing this change become law.

I also want to recognize Senator GRAHAM. Because of his backing and his work with Senator GILLIBRAND, this proposal has gotten the momentum it needs to move forward.

Despite disagreements on both sides, legislation like this is a prime example of both parties finding a way to work together on legislation that will make a tangible difference in people's lives. We want to work with our Republican colleagues on similar proposals whenever possible because at the end of the day, ending forced arbitration for sexual harassment and assault is about making our workplaces safer, holding abusive employers accountable, and making sure that every American can exercise their right to justice in a court of law.

For decades, abusers have used arbitration as a shield for their horrific behavior. Employees have been put at massive disadvantage when trying to hold wrongdoers accountable. This law will finally change all that.

I look forward to finishing the work of passing this bill through the Senate and getting it closer to the President's desk.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority whip.

U.S. SUPREME COURT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I am sure that you, more than most Members of the Senate, remember our debate a few weeks ago on the Voting Rights Act. I remember your statement on the floor. It was powerful and really spoke to the truth of why we were meeting and debating this issue.

We realize that, sadly, since the Civil War, when African Americans were finally given the right to vote, this has been a battle every year since. And yesterday, the Supreme Court decision tells us that we still have a battle to fight when it comes to voting rights in America.

By a 5-to-4 vote yesterday, the Supreme Court's conservative majority allowed Alabama lawmakers to move forward with a congressional districting map that diminishes the power of Black voters in a State where Black Americans account for more than 25 percent of the population.

You see, this case had been considered by a three-judge district court panel in Alabama, and they ruled in a unanimous decision that the map likely violated the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and they ruled that we should block that map because it would violate the right to vote of African Americans.

I might say, for the record, this three-judge panel, two of the three judges were appointed by former President Trump, and yet they came to that conclusion. So the Supreme Court had a decision of whether to go along with this three-judge panel and stop the implementation of this map until they

could have a full hearing on the subject or allow them to go forward. And, sadly, by a 5-to-4 vote, the Supreme Court's conservative majority stayed a lower court's decision, where they ruled unanimously that the district map was discriminatory.

The Supreme Court did not issue a well-reasoned decision; they issued basically no reason. They did so on what is known as the shadow docket. We are seeing it more and more by this Court—no explanation, no full briefing, no signed opinion for the majority. What we have was a scant reaction by the Court.

But I do want to note that Justice Kagan wrote that that decision by the Supreme Court in favor of allowing this Alabama map to go forward “does a disservice to the District Court, which meticulously applied this Court's longstanding voting-rights precedent.” She went on to note that “most of all, it does a disservice to the Black people of Alabama who under that precedent have had their electoral power diminished in violation of the law this Court once knew to buttress all of American democracy.”

Yesterday's decision is the latest example of the Supreme Court hacking away the protections of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, one of the most important civil rights laws in our history—a law singularly responsible for decades of progress in minority representation in public office.

As a result of these decisions, legal protections for voters of color throughout the country are being systematically dismantled by the Republican Party through State legislatures and, sadly, by our Federal courts.

So now what do we do? Well, Congress must act. We must restore the Voting Rights Act to its full power and potential, and we can do that by enacting the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.

This legislation would strengthen and modernize the Voting Rights Act's protections, including by requiring Supreme Court Justices to actually explain their reasoning behind their decisions when they overturn a lower court's decision on a voting rights case. Is that too much to ask, that the Supreme Court explain to the American people why they are overruling a lower court's decision which says Americans are being discriminated against when it comes to their right to vote? I don't think the Supreme Court is that busy that it can't tell the American people its logic behind these decisions.

Every day, we are seeing the consequences of this Senate's failure just a few weeks ago to protect the right to vote. Mr. President, you and I agree; we cannot wait any longer.

JANUARY 6

Mr. President, let me address a related topic: 2022 is an election year. We know that well. And over the next 8 months, both parties will have a chance to make our case to the Amer-

ican people for the November election, to engage in spirited, public debate about the issues that matter: the pandemic, the economy, and the challenges facing our country.

But what happened last week in Salt Lake City, UT, is incredible. The Republican Party made its opening move in this year's election. Instead of offering a vision for the future of America, the Republican Party leaders meeting in Utah chose to attack democracy itself.

On Friday, the Republican National Committee declared that the January 6, 2021, insurrection was a form of “legitimate political discourse.” This outrageous declaration, printed under the official letterhead of the Republican National Committee, is the saddest commentary on what Donald Trump and his acolytes have done to a great political party, the party of Abraham Lincoln.

The violence that we personally witnessed in this Chamber on January 6, 2021, was deadly, seditious, and un-American—far from legitimate. Is that what we call the worst assault on the Capitol since the War of 1812? Was it legitimate political discourse when the violent mob beat police officers with metal poles and assaulted them with bear spray? Was it political discourse that contributed to the death of five police officers who confronted that mob? Was it just merely political discourse when a defeated, embittered former President incited that mob to attack this Capitol Building and do its best to overturn the results of a free election, which he lost? No. It was an incitement to violence and an attack on our democracy.

Let's be clear: The Republican Party's whitewashing of the insurrection isn't just a pathetic capitulation to Donald Trump and his Big Lie; it is a dangerous revelation of the mindset of the leadership of America's Republican Party. By legitimizing the insurrection, Republican Party leaders are exploring the use of violence and saying it is perfectly acceptable, it is legitimate when it comes to the political goals.

This is how democracies die.

Last year, the intelligence community warned that “narratives of fraud in the recent general election . . . will almost certainly spur some [domestic violent extremists] to try to engage in violence.” That came from our intelligence community. This is not a hypothetical.

Over the past year, we have seen how the Big Lie, promulgated by the former, defeated President of the United States, has inspired his supporters to commit and threaten violent acts.

On Friday—the same day that the Republican Party declared that the insurrectionist mob was legitimate political discourse—a Texas man appeared for his first day in court. That man is facing Federal charges for threatening to kill public officials in the home

State of the Presiding Officer, the State of Georgia.

What is exactly alleged to have happened? Well, the day before the January 6 insurrection, this man posted a message on the website Craigslist calling for the murder of three election officials in Georgia. He wrote: “It's our duty as American Patriots to put an end to the lives of these traitors and to take back our country by force. We can no longer wait on the corrupt law enforcement and the corrupt courts. If we want our country back we have to exterminate these people.”

The case against this man is the first case that has been brought forward by the Justice Department's Election Threats Task Force, which the Department established last June in response to the burgeoning threats of violence against election officials. But it is going to be far from the last case, unfortunately. Right now, the Department of Justice is investigating dozens of similar cases.

And less than 1 week after charging this Texas defendant, the Department also charged a man in Nevada who told an election worker that she was going to “die” because she played a part in “stealing” the 2020 election from Donald Trump. Thankfully, that election worker was not physically harmed, but she was shaken and disturbed by that declaration.

She is not alone. Last April, the Brennan Center published a report finding that nearly one in five election officials in America had received threats because of their roles in the 2020 election. One in three of these election officials says they worry for their safety because of the rising tide of political violence. Political violence. And the Republican National Committee describes it as “legitimate political discourse.”

Is this the cost of participating in a democracy in Mr. Trump's vision of America? Since the 2020 election, the former President and his supporters have latched on to the Big Lie to discredit American democracy and the decision of American voters and to go after those who work in it, like election workers.

But this is not the first time a malicious lie has been used to foment distrust, disdain, and even hatred for America's public servants. It was 72 years ago this week that Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy delivered his infamous “Enemies from Within” speech in Wheeling, WV. In that speech, Senator McCarthy pulled a sheet of paper out of his pocket, held it up to the crowd, and claimed he had a list of more than 50 names of Communist agents who had infiltrated our government. These scurrilous accusations by Senator McCarthy made headlines and provoked nationwide hysteria. Rumors abounded about card-carrying Communists working within our government.

And over the next 4 years, Senator McCarthy led a personal witch hunt

against public servants, journalists, members of the military, and average citizens. He destroyed lives in the process. But he never revealed his list of 57 names or any other credible evidence for his claims. Nonetheless, Senator Joe McCarthy discredited and defamed anyone standing in his way. He would accuse his opponents of being Communists or Communist sympathizers if they publicly disagreed with him.

With rare and notable exceptions—and one of them Senator Margaret Chase Smith, Republican Senator of Maine, and a few others—no one had the courage to question Joe McCarthy or challenge his wild allegations. Politicians were too afraid that he would turn on them next, so they remained quiet.

And in the absence of opposition, he assumed even greater power—until 1954, when some courageous members of Senator McCarthy's own political party, the Republican Party, joined together with the Democrats in the Senate. They voted to condemn Senator McCarthy and the lies that had fueled his witch hunt. They stood in a bipartisan majority to do it. With that vote, Senator Joseph McCarthy's reign of terror was brought to an end. The press began to ignore him, and the public had had their fill.

What will it take for our Republican colleagues today to say that they are done with the Big Lie of Trumpism? What will it take for them to reject it and renounce the normalization of political violence? What will it take for Republicans to admit that January 6 was a deadly insurrection, not a "legitimate political discourse"?

Americans of conscience of both political parties and Independents as well need to unite in support of the truth. That doesn't mean we are going to agree on every issue. On the contrary, real debate is the lifeblood of our democracy. But we have to work from a shared set of facts and reality—like the fact that President Biden actually won the 2020 election and there was no evidence of widespread voter fraud.

I want to commend my Republican colleagues who have been willing to speak the truth in the last few days. I know it can't be easy.

Over the weekend, Senator MITT ROMNEY, Senator BILL CASSIDY, and Senator LISA MURKOWSKI spoke out against the Republican National Committee's decision to censure Congresswoman LIZ CHENEY and Congressman ADAM KINZINGER of Illinois for committing the unforgivable sin of investigating the violent assault against American democracy. Unfortunately, they are a small but courageous minority. The vast majority of my Republican colleagues remain silent while their party leaders declare January 6 legitimate.

And on Friday, former Vice President Pence publicly stated: "President Trump is wrong . . . Under the Constitution, I had no right to change the outcome of our election."

That simple, declarative statement of truth—that the Vice President cannot singlehandedly overrule the will of the American people—is welcomed, but the fact that it drew outrage from former President Trump and his supporters is a sad reflection on the reality of today's Republican Party.

If the events leading up to January 6 taught us anything, it is that aspiring authoritarians like Donald Trump will toss aside longstanding laws and values to cling to power. That is why for the past several months, a bipartisan group of Senators have been discussing a proposal to modernize the Electoral Count Act, an obscure law that was at the heart of former President Trump's efforts to overturn the election. I have been working on this effort on our side with Senators KING and KLOBUCHAR, and there is a bipartisan effort, on the same matter, taking place as well.

By updating the Electoral Count Act, we can make clear that the Vice President does not have the power to reject a State's lawfully appointed electors and overturn the results of an election. That is important, and I believe it is a promising sign that Democrats and Republicans are going to join together in discussion of finally rewriting this ancient law.

But I also want to be honest about the scope of threats facing our American democracy. At a moment when too many Republican Party leaders are legitimizing the January 6 insurrection and Republican State legislators are erecting new barriers to the ballot box, particularly for African Americans, we must have the courage to restore the Voting Rights Act. And we need to come together across party lines to defend our democracy, condemn violence, and to live by the rule of law, not the rule of the mob.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PADILLA). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

INFLATION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I don't need to tell anyone—except perhaps the Democratic Party here in Congress—that our country has a major inflation problem. The first year of the Biden administration has been characterized by a huge increase in inflation. Inflation is currently at a 40-year high. Let me just repeat that. Inflation is currently at a 40-year high. The last time inflation was this bad, "E.T." was just premiering in movie theaters and "Return of the Jedi" hadn't even come out yet.

Inflation is so bad that despite wage increases in 2021, Americans saw a de facto pay cut. A December survey by the New York Times found that just 17 percent of Americans said their wages had kept up with inflation.

The White House Chief of Staff may think inflation is "a high-class problem," but for the mom at the grocery store wondering if she can afford to buy ground beef this week or for the young worker just starting out who is wondering if she can afford to fill up her car, inflation is a very real problem.

Americans are struggling. They are facing huge price increases at the grocery store; huge price increases at the gas pump; big increases in the cost of household goods, like furniture and bedding and laundry equipment; massive increases in the cost of fuel oil and gas service; higher electric bills; and on and on.

Inflation is weighing down businesses, too, from larger businesses to family farms and ranches. A recent survey from the National Federation of Independent Business found that 22 percent of small businesses consider inflation to be the biggest challenge facing their business, a 20-point increase from the beginning of 2021—a 20-point increase.

It is no wonder that 69 percent of Americans disapprove of the President's handling of inflation and 56 percent disapprove of his handling of the economy.

Inflation is a major burden for American families and businesses—a fact that seems utterly lost on members of the Democratic Party. While American families struggle, Democrats' focus is on anything but inflation.

What is worse, many Democrats are still hoping to pass elements of their reckless tax-and-spending spree, the so-called Build Back Better plan, despite the fact that it was a bloated Democrat spending spree that helped get us into this inflation mess in the first place. Yes, while the pandemic created inflationary pressures, a big reason we are in our current inflation mess is because of Democrats' decision to push through an unnecessary and partisan \$2 trillion spending bill last March.

When Democrats took office last January, inflation was well within an acceptable range, what is known as the target inflation rate. It might have stayed there had Democrats not decided that they needed to pass a massive government spending spree under the guise of COVID relief and, I might add, mere weeks after Congress had already passed a major COVID bill. That is right. December 2020 saw Congress pass its fifth bipartisan COVID relief bill, and that one was a nearly \$1 trillion piece of legislation that met essentially all current pressing COVID needs. But the ink was barely dry on the page before Democrats decided that they needed to take advantage of the COVID situation to pass yet another bill—this time, a hyperpartisan \$1.9 trillion piece of legislation packed with unnecessary government spending and payoffs to Democrat interest groups.

Again, there were five bipartisan COVID bills, the last of which passed in December of 2020. It was a \$1 trillion